

## Kenai Adopt-A-Stream program

by Dan Pascucci

They're out there.

On any given afternoon, down by local creeks, you might see them. Sometimes they're in the water, other times, they gather around the banks. You can occasionally hear their singing, and if you get close enough, you will surely hear their chatter.

Despite the fact that the Kenai Peninsula is home to many groups of these amazing creatures, most people aren't even aware of their existence. So today's Refuge Notebook will introduce you to some very important characters on the peninsula... Stream Keepers.

Stream Keepers are highly dedicated fifth and sixth graders from local elementary schools that have made a commitment to monitoring the health of local creeks and streams through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Adopt-A-Stream program.

The Adopt-A-Stream program has been connecting students to the local watershed since 1992, when a partnership between the Kenai Fish and Wildlife Field Office and Kalifornsky Beach Elementary School was formed. Since then, the program has expanded to include Tustumena Elementary, and the Soldotna Montessori School.

Stream Keepers at these schools monitor the health of Slikok Creek (K-Beach), Crooked Creek (Tustumena), and Soldotna Creek (SMS), on a monthly basis. With the assistance and technical guidance of Fish and Wildlife Service personnel, classes measure stream discharge, air and water temperatures, pH, conductivity, turbidity, and dissolved oxygen levels.

Students also collect, identify, record, and release fish and aquatic insects.

Along with exciting field trips, classrooms participating in the Adopt-A-Stream program are visited once a month by office staff for an in-class lesson on topics including fish, insects, cold weather safety, and water quality.

But don't be mistaken... despite all of the hard work involved in adopting a stream, these students are still having fun. Whether they're singing "insect Christmas carols" or practicing dance moves in the water, a visit to the stream or a lesson in the classroom is always a good time.

Adopt-A-Stream offers an opportunity for local schoolchildren to not simply learn about, but to experience the importance of healthy streams. Through their experiences at local streams, students reach a new understanding of their local watershed, and from that understanding comes a new appreciation for the resource.

So maybe the next time you're down by your favorite local creek some afternoon, you'll get a glimpse of some of these incredible creatures at work, getting their feet wet and immersing themselves in the study of the many natural wonders that surround us on the Kenai Peninsula. They're out there... and we sure are happy to know that they are.

*Dan is an SCA volunteer intern at the Kenai Fish and Wildlife Field Office of the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Soldotna. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.*